DCCUMENT RESUME

ED 036 337 PS 002 883

TITLE THE SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER IN THE NEW YORK STATE EXPERIMENTAL PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAM.

INSTITUTION NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPT., ALBANY. BUREAU OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND PARENT EDUCATION.

PUB DATE 69

NOTE 5P.

EDRS PRICE EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.35

DESCRIPTORS PARENT PARTICIPATION, *PRESCHCOL EDUCATION, *PRESCHCOL PROGRAMS, SOCIAL SERVICES, *SOCIAL WORKERS

ABSTRACT

THE NEW YORK STATE EXPERIMENTAL PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS ARE INTERDISCIPLINARY ENDEAVORS WHOSE PURPOSE IS TO IMPROVE THE EDUCATIONAL CPPCRTUNITIES OF DISADVANTAGED 3- AND 4-YEAR-OLDS. BECAUSE THE PUPIL SERVICES THEY CFFER ARE OF CENTRAL IMPORTANCE TO THESE PROGRAMS, THE SOCIAL WCRKER IS AN INTEGRAL MEMBER OF THE PREKINDERGARTEN STAFF AND HAS MANY DIVERSE FUNCTIONS TO PERFORM. THE SCCIAL WORKER CAN BE ASSISTED IN THE SOCIAL SERVICES COMPONENT OF THE PROGRAM BY PUPIL SERVICES AIDES RECRUITED FROM LOCAL DISADVANTAGED NEIGHBCRHOCDS. RECENT EMPHASIS ON PARENT PARTICIPATION IN PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS HIGHLIGHTS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SOCIAL WORKER'S MAIN FUNCTION: THE ESTABLISHMENT CF EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS. SCME OTHER SUGGESTED FUNCTICNS FCR A SOCIAL WORKER ARE (1) TO ACT AS LIAISON BETWEEN THE PROGRAM AND CCMMUNITY SOCIAL AGENCIES, (2) TO PARTICIPATE ACTIVELY IN THE SELECTION AND RECRUITMENT OF CHILDREN, (3) TC COCRDINATE THE EFFORTS OF ALL INDIVIDUALS AND AGENCIES INVOLVED, AND (4) TO CONTRIBUTE INFORMATION TO CONFIDENTIAL PUPIL RECORDS. (MH)

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ED 036337

The School Social Worker in the New York State Experimental Prekindergarten Program

A Joint Statement

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PS 002883

THE SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER
IN THE NEW YORK STATE EXPERIMENTAL PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAM

Experimental Prekindergarten Programs

Experimental prekindergarten programs are planned, multi-discipline, educational efforts directed toward 3- and/or 4-year-old children from the most disadvantaged homes in school districts across New York State. Indeed, 90 percent of the prekindergarten children come from families who evidence several of the following conditions: economic dependence upon public assistance; dwelling in crowded, substandard housing in segregated, low socioeconomic or remote rural areas; history of problem behavior or chronic illness; living conditions which are harmful or limiting to development; single parent or frequent changes in parent; low achievement or aspirational level.

Under the leadership and coordination of an education program director, each prekindergarten staff works as a team in providing appropriate experience and support which will alleviate the cycle of deprivation and help prevent progressive educational retardation in both children and their families.

Need for a Qualified Social Worker

A social worker can provide expertise in the recruitment and selection of children, in working with community agencies to affect positive change in home environments, and in helping the team better understand significant home conditions. But more than this, a social worker can help the team to build effective home-school relations and to involve parents directly in the educational experiences of their children.

Parent involvement is important to the success of the prekindergarten programs, for permanent gains in children cannot be made without parental cooperation and parental understanding of program goals. Parents do not learn through merely being told what every good parent should know by middle-class standards. Parents learn by experiencing, feeling, and coming to understand a life-style different from their own. Therefore, even though all team members, including teachers, non-certified staff and nurse-teachers, are equally important in developing effective relationships with parents, each prekindergarten program needs a sensitive social worker.

This job assignment requires an ability to relate with families, to maintain the confidence and trust of parents, to function as a team member, to involve community resources in a sustained effort, and to suggest appropriate experiences for meaningful involvement of parents in the educational program, thereby extending their knowledge. Social workers in prekindergarten programs, whenever possible, should have some appropriate field experience and a master's degree in social work (MSW).

Need for Pupil Services Aide (s)

In large prekindergarten programs, or in programs employing part-time social workers, the pupil services aide(s) may be employed to assist and supplement the social services program component. These aides, usually coming from local disadvantaged neighborhoods, are not intended to take the place of a qualified social worker, since they lack the necessary educational and experiential background to overcome many difficult problems without adequate supervision and guidance. Even though the aide(s) possess skill in relating with parents and in identifying for the team significant neighborhood conditions, they still need systematic inservice education. The social worker plays an important role in the aides' career development. The only direct supervisory function of the social worker in prekindergarten programs involves developing a working relationship with the aide(s), and in assisting the aide(s) in defining his work responsibilities.

The Social Worker --- Full-time or Part-time?

Whether a social worker should function on a part-time or full-time basis is determined by the local community and depends on other staff strengths and regional needs of families. In some programs where the social worker is assisted by a strong team effort for the involvement of parents in the program, and/or by the employment of auxiliary staff in the form of pupil services aide(s), the social worker may be employed on a part-time basis. A program with as many as 300 children would probably need two social workers or a social worker and more than one aide. In other situations, with 150 or fewer children, one social worker might function on a full- or part-time basis depending on other staff strengths and needs of the region. Part-time social workers must determine priorities from the list of suggested functions which follow.

Suggested Functions of the Prekindergarten Social Worker

1. To provide leadership and consultation in helping the team maintain relationships with parents and build effective home-school relations, he shall:

   - assist the team by inviting parents to visit the school, to conference with the teacher, to observe or participate in the classroom, or to attend parent meetings and other school functions

   - obtain and interpret to the team pertinent information about a child and his home situation which relates to his adjustment at school

   - assist the team by interpreting to parents the nature of the program and by sharing with parents the child's adjustment in school

- counsel parents and encourage appropriate involvement in the program to modify those circumstances within the home that will result in more favorable conditions for the child's growth and development

- provide leadership and consultation in helping parents to organize and plan programs to meet their needs and participate in such programs with parents

2. To establish and maintain working relationships with community and social agencies and other specialized professional resources which provide services to children and families, he shall:

   - prepare referral summaries (academic and social information, psychological reports, etc.) to be made available, with parents' permission, to community resources

   - assist parents in following through on team recommendations for specialized help for the child, and assist parents with application procedures

   - obtain from social agencies such information as will assist the team in its educational plan for the child

3. To participate in and provide leadership in the selection and recruitment of children for the program

4. To help facilitate communication and coordination of efforts between school, home and community in individual consultations, and at team meetings or case conferences, he shall:

   - provide ongoing consultation for teachers in conjunction with the director, psychologist, nurse-teacher, and other team members regarding adjustment of individual children

   - assist prekindergarten teachers in providing consultation to kindergarten teachers regarding the progress of individual children

   - provide consultation and periodic reports to the director and to the team for program planning, implementation, and evaluation

   - participate in the orientation and inservice education of the total team when applicable

5. To contribute professional data significant to a child's current and future school adjustment for confidential pupil records, in conjunction with the team and school district pupil services, he shall:

   - prepare and send followup reports for families transferring within the school system or to another school district so needed services can be sustained

- maintain up-to-date records including statistical and case reports

SUGGESTED SOCIAL WORK FUNCTIONS OF PUPIL SERVICES AIDE

1. Under the leadership, supervision and guidance of the professional social worker, the pupil services aide(s) establish and maintain positive relationships with parents through home visits and informal contacts at school. He shall:

   - invite parents to visit the school, talk with the teachers, observe or participate in the classroom, attend parent meetings or other school functions
   - encourage parents to come for regular teacher conferences and for child's physical and dental examinations
   - help the team by sharing with parents the positive aspects of a child's growth and adjustment at school
   - assist in obtaining information on a child and his environment which relates to a child's adjustment at school upon the advice of social worker
   - assist in identifying parent interests and concerns for program development
   - interpret community and neighborhood conditions to other members of the school staff
   - participate in parent group meetings
   - follow up immediately on school absences and help identify for school staff those problems which make a child's attendance difficult
   - assist some parents by accompanying them to clinics, agencies, or other community resources which have been recommended
   - assist social worker with records and reports

Summary

Pupil services is an important component of all New York State Experimental Prekindergarten Programs. An effective social worker not only adds strength to each prekindergarten team, but within the pupil services component, provides expertise for a more comprehensive approach to the solution of difficult problems of families.

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